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Turncoat Spy No Neophyte

EXCLUSIVE TO THE SPOTLIGHT

By Victor Marchetti

Edward Lee Howard, 34, the fugitive former CIA officer who sold out to the Soviet KGB two years ago after being fired by the U.S. spy agency, has now defected to the Soviet Union. Howard avoided arrest and certain prosecution for treason when he was granted political asylum by the Kremlin earlier this month.

Howard's defection is a particularly bad blow to the CIA and U.S. intelligence. He was a far more important and knowledgeable clandestine operator than the spy agency has ever admitted, either to the congressional oversight committees or the American public. But now that he is in the hands of the KGB, the cat will soon be out of the bag.

Therefore, CIA officials have begun to confide to key members of Congress that Howard was more than a mere novice agent who was being trained for a low-level assignment in Moscow.

The SPOTLIGHT, when reporting on the defection and subsequent "defection" of KGB officer Vitaly Yurchenko (SPOTLIGHT, Dec. 23, 1985), suggested Howard was a much more valuable operator than the spy agency was willing to let on. The CIA's claim that he had only recently been hired and then quickly exposed by a polygraph (lie detector) test as being unfit—because of drinking, drug abuse and womanizing—was a patently false story designed to protect the agency from embarrassment.

NO NEOPHYTE

The deception fostered by the CIA that Howard was a neophyte may have been swallowed by Congress and the news media, but intelligence professionals only smiled and shook their heads. For one thing, beginners are rarely selected for sensitive assignments, such as Moscow.

(There was an exception a few years ago when Martha Peterson was assigned to the communist capital. However, she was quickly caught and exposed by the KGB. She was sent home, and her Soviet contact was executed.)

Secondly, because of the KGB's close surveillance and the intense pressure it applies to U.S. intelligence operations on Soviet soil, CIA clandestine case officers must be highly disguised—even when under official cover and operating out of the relative safety of the embassy.

Howard's background indicates he had been building his cover for several years, while, carefully and patiently, being trained by carrying out low-level operations in less dangerous surroundings than Moscow.

His first CIA assignment, after his basic operational training, had been as a junior officer with the Agency for International Development (AID) in Bolivia. (The CIA uses AID as both a training ground for young officers and as cover for more senior operations officers.)

A few years later, he resigned from AID and joined the State Department as a Foreign Service officer. While with the State Department, he was sent to the American University in Washington to study for a master's degree.

On the surface, Howard appeared to be just another bright young man interested in international affairs.

But he was not. He was a spy in training, building the cover that would be necessary for the real work he was intended eventually to do as a clandestine case officer in Moscow—the work he would never actually do for the CIA.

Somewhere along the line, Howard went bad. His personality and private life came unstuck. It was only a matter of time before he would be spotted and recruited by the KGB or come to the attention of the CIA's counterintelligence staff. Fortunately, the CIA discovered its mistake before posting him to Moscow, where the KGB would have surely recognized Howard as a weak link and "turned" him.

Unfortunately, however, both the CIA and the FBI flubbed up their attempts to keep Howard under surveillance after he had been fired and later had threatened to deal with the Soviets. Then, after he had already sold out to the KGB, America's two top intelligence agencies stumbled again, and let him get away.

DAMAGING TO CIA OPERATIONS

Today, Edward Lee Howard is in Moscow telling the KGB everything he knows about CIA clandestine operations there. Already at least one Soviet subject, an aeronautical engineer who was spying for the CIA, has been exposed and executed.

Moreover, five CIA case officers posing as diplomatic officials have been exposed and expelled by the Soviet Union.

In addition to the damage he has already caused, Howard, now that he can be interrogated in depth by the KGB, could wreck the CIA's entire Moscow apparatus. For one thing, he can identify all CIA personnel working at the agency's station in the embassy there.

He may also be able to finger all the CIA's clandestine assets, both Soviet and non-Soviet, and agents being "run" out of the station. With such knowledge, the KGB will be able to "roll up" just about every CIA operation now being

conducted in the communist capital.

Beyond that devastation, Howard will be able to provide the KGB with the kind of special information that only intelligence defectors can produce. He will be able to explain in detail how the CIA's clandestine services are organized, how its operators are trained and what is the agency's operational philosophy regarding the Soviet target.

He will be able to reveal both the strengths and weaknesses of Soviet Russian division within the CIA's directorate of operations.

Moreover, he will be able to identify its personnel at headquarters in Langley, Virginia, what their operational methods and techniques are, and most importantly what their preferred targets are. In the process, he may also be in a position to expose the operations of allied intelligence services.

But above all else, Howard will be able to give the Soviets a feel for how things are done in the CIA and why. In the clandestine war between the CIA and KGB, this is more important than anything else. ●